



January 1995

Rev. Elder Troy Perry At The United Nations For World AIDS Day

Also representing UFMCC AIDS Ministry at the United Nations ceremony were Rev. Herbert Evans and Rev. Steve Pieters, both of whom serve on the ANIN Board of Directors. Rev's. Evans and Pieters, carrying the ANIN banner, led the procession from the Church Center to the plaza where the bell ringing ceremony took place.



(continued on page 3)

National Skills Building Conference Report



(continued on page 2)

Their Light Is Our Beacon

A message of hope for hopeless times
(By Rev. Herbert Evans)

[Rev. Herbert E. Evans is the Member Services Coordinator for We the People Living with HIV/AIDS of the Delaware Valley, Inc., Philadelphia, PA.]

By God's grace, and our own efforts, we have lived through another holiday season. Things have remained eerily the same. It is still an all too commercial time, with most of the emphasis upon the marketing and peddling of goods. We have hustled and bustled about, attempting to give; hoping to receive. For those of us who live in the Northeastern United States, the air has been cold and biting, some of us experiencing its ravages from homeless disadvantage points. For those stuck on the outside, the prayer was that Christmas wouldn't be too white.

For those more fortunate, the warmth of the hearth, the family present, albeit a nuclear family not always of the "mom 'n' pop" kind, undergirded and nurtured us through another Christmas, and the facing of another year's end, assessing what happened, and longing for a brighter tomorrow in the New Year. The shift in the politics of our nation, that we who are too poor or uninformed to relate to, will seize us by our lack, as the tightening of federal purse strings makes life harsher.

Our abilities to have hope in the midst of our disabilities have been sorely put to the test. Where is that hope? And how can we keep on going? I would submit to you, to myself, to us, that "THEIR LIGHT IS OUR BEACON." Who is the "Their?" Those who have gone on before us. There is a rich, deeply spiritual, and ethnically appropriate legacy for each of us who are "alive and kicking."

Regardless of who we are, from gender to color to ability or

disability, there are heroes out there who have paved the way. Some are known, others not known. But people have sacrificed, believed and dreamed, so that we might simply "be." Whatever your religious heritage might be, or even if you do not have a faith tradition, people have lived, and have learned how to live rightly, facing whatever calamities or challenges were present for that particular moment in time.

It may do us well to remember our heroes, and revisit their strengths and focus on their power that sustained them "in spite of." The times have never spoken more loudly for us "to come into our own." From whatever vantage point we come from, in order to make it, we need to be sane and whole, intentionally moving towards something in life that will keep us, as we face our lives one day at a time. We must look to the hills of history, from whence comes our help, and know that our ultimate help comes from the essence of the great "I AM." As we begin this new year, may it be a time of cleansing, inventory, and resolve to make great gains in 1995. There is help, and there is hope. Never lose hope! No matter what.

In the Christmas season just past, the cradle was full of hope when the star shined ever so brightly. Others saw this ray of hope and seized it and ran on to see what the end was going to be. May you and I, we and us, grab hold of "THEIR LIGHT," which IS our hope. May we embrace the times, which are calling for healthy, whole, sane and responsible people to take control of their lives and their destinies. The hope of the new year is that we will be in that number of the counted, who cared, lived, loved, and became community. May every conceivable blessing be yours as you seek renewal in this new year. "THEIR LIGHT IS OUR BEACON!" ▼

National Skills Building...

(continued from page 1)

Church in Atlanta, who preached at the AIDS Interfaith Service. In his sermon, he featured UFMCC's challenge to the National Council of Churches, and related his memory of attending MCC San Francisco with other members of the NCC. He told the congregation in Atlanta why the NCC is so threatened by UFMCC: "Because UFMCC is doing it right!"

Rev. Pieters presented a workshop on how to do a "Spiritual Strength for Survival" support group. The workshop was packed, with people standing and sitting on the floor by the walls. Those who attended gave much praise to the presentation. Rev. Elder Eastman reflected, "The enthusiastic response to this workshop by so many service groups really confirms the excellence of this program for local church HIV/AIDS Ministry. I hope that all of our UFMCC congregations and districts will take advantage of this valuable resource."

UFMCC AIDS Ministry resources were made available at the conference resource fair. Rev. Pieters reports, "We brought over 400 of each of our pamphlets, and they were all snapped up before half the conference was over. We also sold out the "Spiritual Strength for Survival" manuals and the "Christian Caring" manuals. Hundreds of order forms were taken as well. People from many different backgrounds returned after reading our pamphlets and manuals, wanting more copies."

Rev. Pieters was honored to introduce Coretta Scott King when she spoke at the final plenary luncheon. "Mrs. King was extremely gracious and inspiring," Pieters says. "She gave a powerful speech, demanding justice for lesbians and gay men, and urgently calling for compassion for all persons living with HIV/AIDS."

Rev. Evans introduced Ron Nyswaner, the award-winning screenwriter of the film "Philadelphia," when he spoke at the ANIN banquet. Mr. Nyswaner re-

(continued on page 4)

U.S. Surgeon General Worships at MCC-DC

In one of her last official appearances as U.S. Surgeon General, Joycelyn Elders, her husband, and six of her staff worshiped at MCC Washington D.C. on Sunday, December 4 for World AIDS Sunday. Urging MCC Washington to keep up the fight against HIV/AIDS, Dr. Elders received a standing ovation both before and after she spoke. The following Friday, she was fired as Surgeon General, due to remarks she made at a World AIDS Day event on December 1 in New York City. She had suggested that "perhaps" masturbation should be included in education programs about safe sex for youths.

Rev. Steve Taylor, Interim Pastor of MCC Washington, noted that he had invited her to worship (and she had accepted) long before the controversy over her remarks on World AIDS Day. One of her staff, James Bemberg, is a deacon candidate at MCC Washington, D.C. ▼

United Nations - World AIDS Day

siding Bishop of the Episcopal Church in the U.S., Bishop Herbert W. Chilstrom, Presiding Bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Rabbi Deborah A. Hirsch, the Finance Secretary of the Central Conference of American Rabbis, Rev. John Buehrens, President of the Unitarian Universalist Association, Imam Talib Adbur-Rashid of the Islamic Community, Ms. Yael Shman, Director of the Reconstructionist Rabbinical Association, Rev. Deacon Philemon Sevastiades, of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of North and South America, the Most Rev. Joseph A. Francis, S.V.D., of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops/United States Catholic Conference, and the Rev. Dr. Richard Hamm, General Minister and President of the Disciples of Christ.



Rev's. Steve Pieters, Herbert Evans, Troy Perry, Ken South, and Steve Taylor lead the Interfaith procession in front of the United Nations.

New Appointments For MCC Leaders

Rev. Joseph Gilbert, pastor of MCC For All the Saints, in Los Angeles, CA, has been elected Chair of the Spiritual Advisory Committee of AIDS Project Los Angeles. The Spiritual Advisory Committee is comprised of volunteer clergy and laity from a wide variety of religious traditions. In addition to offering pastoral care and counseling to clients of AIDS Project Los Angeles, the Spiritual Advisory Committee conducts in-service training for staff and educational opportunities for faith communities and their leadership, as well as volunteers and clients of APLA.

Rev. Ralph Lasher of MCC of the Resurrection in Houston, Texas, has been named Program and Development Director of the Kolbe Project. The Kolbe Project is "a ministry of unconditional love to men and women who have become alienated from the practice of their faith or have never known God's love... to persons who are disenfranchised by society, to gays and lesbians and other sexual minorities; the lonely, hurting... and to those who are terminally ill. It is modeled after the ministry of St. Francis of Assisi." Of the 3,000 clients served, over 2,000 have been non-Catholics. Rev. Lasher was formerly Executive Director of the Montrose Clinic in Houston.



Rev. Elder Troy Perry signs The Council Call; also pictured: Rev. Steve Taylor, Sr. Anne Dougherty, Rev. John Buehrens, Bishop Sherman Hicks.

Members of the Board of Directors of the AIDS National Interfaith Network, as well as many members of the Council of National Religious AIDS Networks were also witnesses to this historic event. Rev. Dr. James Forbes, the Senior Minister at Riverside Church in New York, gave the keynote luncheon address, speaking about "compassion fatigue." He followed two persons living with AIDS who spoke about their personal experiences of benefiting from AIDS ministries.

Five years ago, many of these same leaders met under ANIN's sponsorship at the Carter Presidential Center of Emory University in Atlanta, GA, to forge a common mission statement for the religious response to AIDS. The Atlanta Declaration was signed and formed a basis for much of the compassionate response within the AIDS community since December of 1989. ▼



Rev. Elder Troy Perry leads the Ceremony of the Bells, World AIDS Day 1994.

Mr. Kelly Byrnes, Pastoral Leader of MCC Bridgerland in Logan, Utah, has been appointed to serve on the Utah Department of Health's HIV Prevention Community Planning Committee. This is a participatory process for developing a comprehensive HIV prevention plan with other governmental agencies, non-governmental agencies, and representatives of communities and groups at risk for HIV infection or already infected. ▼

Ontario Cabinet Minister Addresses MCC Toronto

Ontario Consumer and Commercial Relations Minister Marilyn Churley received a warm welcome on Sunday, December 4, as she addressed the Metropolitan Community Church of Toronto, where over 15% of the congregation is HIV-positive.

Ms. Churley spoke at the 11:00 a.m. service of MCC Toronto on behalf of Health Minister Ruth Grier, to announce the government's plans to extend the Ontario drug benefit plan for people facing catastrophic diseases.

Ontario premier Bob Rae has announced that the province will implement a catastrophic drug plan to serve as a "safety net" for the working poor who have exhausted their work drug benefits or who have no coverage at all. For many people living with catastrophic diseases, the announcement means they won't be forced onto welfare to become eligible for assistance. AIDS activists are calling it a major political victory in a time when victories are few.

At a recent convention of the province's ruling New Democratic Party (NDP) AIDS activists had threatened to burn the Premier in effigy during AIDS awareness week unless he followed through on political promises made when his party was seeking office in 1990. Spokespersons for AIDS Action Now are calling the announcement the best news they've heard yet and the result of direct pressure from persons living with HIV/AIDS within the social-democratic political party. The NDP has an active Lesbian and Gay caucus which is elected at the party's full convention.

At the December 4 service of MCC Toronto, Ms. Churley received a standing ovation as she announced the government's plan to initiate public consultation on details of the program which is to come into effect in April, 1995. The consultation will include discussions on eligibility and on which drugs will be included.

She could not have chosen a more appropriate location, according to MCC Toronto's senior pastor, the Rev. Brent Hawkes.

"We are the church with HIV/AIDS," Rev. Hawkes said,

referring to the present 100-person case-load of the church's aidsCARE program which offers a wide range of services to people living with HIV/AIDS. The program was founded as a result of a bequest from a former CBC reporter who died of AIDS several years ago.

"Too many people living with AIDS have seen their life savings devastated by the high cost of prescription drugs," Rev. Hawkes said. "And as we mark International AIDS Awareness Week, the Ontario government's announcement will offer true compassion, hope and the potential for an improved standard of living for the thousands of Ontarians living with HIV/AIDS. Our congregation wants to thank the Ontario government."

The government is expected to set aside between \$60- and \$80 million annually for the drug plan which will include a deductible amount based on income. The four AIDS drugs now covered by the plan will continue to be covered (AZT, aerosolized pentamidine, ddI and ddC.) Other drugs may be added following the consultation.

A spokesperson for the provincial Health Ministry said there are situations where people are going on social assistance to get drug coverage. "No one should be faced with the choice between eating and buying drugs," she said.

Rev. Hawkes of MCC Toronto has been calling for government action for four years. He broke into tears as he welcomed and hugged the Minister at the pulpit. Lesbians and gays in Canada, it seems, know who their friends are.

MCC Toronto is located in the heart of Ms. Churley's Riverdale district. The Minister, accompanied by Canada's first elected provincial legislator who is fully hearing impaired, were warmly welcomed by the congregation, in part because of their strong support for Bill 167-Ontario's spousal rights bill. The bill was defeated because the ruling party allowed a free vote and failed to win over rural and older members. The Honourable Marilyn Churley lives only three blocks from the church and has attended often. She holds many of her political functions in the church social hall. ▼

World AIDS Day In New Zealand

Rev. Elder Wilhelmina Hein reports from New Zealand that "the Mayor of Christchurch arrived in Cathedral Square to speak at the World AIDS Day ceremonies on the motorbikes of the South Island gay bike club! We (MCC) were there to help raise money and spread the Good News about God in the midst of AIDS." She reports that they raised over \$3,000 during the World AIDS Day event.

"The Anglican Cathedral tolled their bells for the 362 New Zealanders that have died and there was much consciousness raising from public personalities throughout the Canterbury Province. There was lots of regional and national coverage of events throughout New Zealand.

"Yet, at the end of the day, and in talking to others involved, I have a very strong feeling the next battle around

AIDS are still the major theological issues. People here are dealing with the care and illness issues, there is government funding and lots of public profile, but theologically we still need to do so much." Rev. Elder Hein will meet with Rev. Steve Pieters, Field Director of UFMCC AIDS Ministry, to discuss possible approaches to the problem when she visits Los Angeles in January.

Rev. Elder Hein reports that the New Zealand government is increasing funding for HIV education, prevention and care issues by 10-15% in 1995. There have been less than 400 deaths in New Zealand due to HIV/AIDS, and the current caseload in the whole province surrounding Christchurch is less than 40. She believes this is a tribute to the well-funded education and prevention campaigns in New Zealand. ▼

National Skills Building...

(continued from page 2)

lated his spiritual journey as a gay man, and shared many funny stories about the Academy Awards and his experiences in Hollywood.

After the Conference, Rev. Evans said, "It was the most professionally run conference I ever attended. The selection of workshops that I attended were extremely valuable to me both as a clergy person and as a professional working in the field of HIV/AIDS. I highly recommend the conference for future participants." ▼

ALERT

ALERT is a monthly newsletter containing information on AIDS Legislation, Education, Research and Treatment. The Editor is Rev. Dr. A. Stephen Pieters. For more information, please write: ALERT, 5300 Santa Monica Blvd., #304, Los Angeles, CA 90029.